To start with, there are fundamental factors, worth highlighting, which have shaped and are shaping world affairs. First, the world we live in remains a unipolar and polarized space.

Contrary to Fareed Zakaria’s post-American world thesis and other such similar theses, United States and the West broadly remain significantly dominant in world affairs – and a quick glance at defence expenditures confirm that the world would remain unipolar for ages to come and the state of geopolitical arrangements imply that the world would remain polarized for some time.

So, even though the Chinese would inevitably overtake United States as the biggest economy in the world and in spite of the recent Goldman Sachs prediction that “BRICS countries to account for almost 40 per cent of global gross domestic product (GDP) by 2050”, unipolarity would continue shaping world affairs. Some of us have been arguing that public opinion is emerging as the (next) superpower, but we are still very far from the environment where collective will and action dominates.

The second critical issue is that what was emerging as coalescing forces over the past 10 years or so is fading. It appeared, especially in the past 5 years, that our political leaders were embracing a more cooperative approach to global geopolitical affairs. However, aligned to the unipolarity of the world, the West or some leaders in the West are pulling their own direction while the dynamics at a global level, especially the increasing significance of the Global South, suggested that we all have to work together for the world we want – it might very well be that we want different worlds.

The third critical development – which is largely connected to the unjustified dominance of the West – is that capitalism has failed. For the past 20 years or so, the free market economic philosophy has been worsening the human condition. Arguably, capitalism contributed significantly to the advancement of global welfare and wellbeing until about the 1980s. For the Global South in particular, the advancements that emanated from the free market economy were not significant. As
Andre Gunder Frank, Samir Amin and others have argued, the West, through the exploitative capitalist system, benefited at the expense of the Global South.

The fourth important factor relates to what Samuel Huntington termed *Clash of Civilizations*. The world is far more divided today than it was, say, 10 years ago. There remains a looming threat of a break out of another war, either in the form of another but more subtle Cold War or an outright World War. The arrogance of the West remains a liability to world peace, and world prosperity.

The fifth and the last critical reality that our evolving world faces is that uncertainty is increasing to confounding levels. Until about 2 years ago or so, we could predict most aspects of development and politics, and especially those relating to economics, with a small margin of error. It would seem, currently and going forward, that most predictions are far off the mark. It is another (new) world in the making. Linked to uncertainty is volatility in global politics. The evolution of a new world is not only uncertain but also volatile – humanity is on a knife-edge again.

As the young Karl Marx and Frederick Engels opined, correctly so, in the *Communist Manifesto*: our world, and our history, is predominantly a history of class struggle. The factors mentioned above about the world we live in substantiate Marx and Engels’ view of the history of the world.

John Toye, lamenting the return of free market economics as spearheaded by Ronald Regan and Margaret Thatcher, proclaimed it a counterrevolution. Commentators on the recent developments in the Middle East contend that we have witnessed an Arab Spring – though some, presently, argue that it was actually or it would turn out to be an Arab Winter. The anti-apartheid project was effectively a class struggle, in many respects. We are in a class struggle even today, and we will remain in a class struggle for years to come.

Given the ongoing class struggle that continues unabated, the potential solutions for our continent require robust change, both at a philosophical or conceptual level and practically. The same applies to the Global South broadly.
Persuasive advice from Hernando de Soto and others are not enough, as practicable as they seem, without the philosophical underpinnings for a (new) developmental agenda. Africa has a critical role to play in defining and shaping the new world, because ideas from the West have lost legitimacy.

There are a couple of salient characteristics about Africa – south of the Sahara specifically – that are worth noting in the context of rethinking Africa’s political economy. Socio-economic development in Africa has been largely a function of the repulsive political history of the continent.

Walter Rodney, Bade Onimode and Claude Ake are among the scholars who have written extensively about the extent to which the West impoverished Africa. In addition, Frantz Fanon’s work recounted the psychological damage that colonialism plays in post-independent Africa.

Thandika Mkandawire has, furthermore, demonstrated how the West and its institutions – the Bretton Woods family or the Washington Consensus agenda – destabilized socio-economic progress in Sub-Saharan Africa.

It is in this context that Marcus Garvey, a while back, and Thabo Mbeki, more recently, among others, have argued for Pan-Africanism; a philosophy – in the context of African Renaissance – that should shape Africa’s approach to development and global affairs. This has a lot to do with the unity of Africa, the unity that Nelson Mandela dreamt of, the unity that Nyerere, Nkrumah, and others pursued vigorously.

The second fact about Africa worth highlighting, in the context of the analysis of the political economy of Africa, is what François Ndengwe (Chairman of African Advisory Board) calls the heterogeneity of the African continent in terms of language, ethnicity and religion.

The main point here is that Africa is the most diversified continent in the world – for instance, Africa accounts for over 60% of all the world languages. David Reynods reflects on how Africa’s diversity, in relation to tribal and ethnic lines, has been manipulated at the expense of Africa and Africans – Reynods argues, for example, that “tribal and ethnic identities which are colonial constructs became politicised because they
[are] potential conduits to secure state resources”. This is a fact worth reflecting upon because diversity can both be a curse and a blessing.

The third fact about Africa has to do with poverty (and inequality). Recent estimates suggest that there are about 2.5 billion people worldwide living in poverty. Although poverty has been declining, it remains one of the biggest challenges for Africa. Paul Collier has argued that 70% of the Bottom Billion are people in Africa. Because poverty is a social construct, as argued elsewhere, it follows that Africa shouldn’t be this poor. In particular, Africa has experienced declining per capita incomes for a very long period.

The fourth fact about Africa relates to the economy of the continent. In the recent past, Africa has been performing relatively well. After significant setbacks from the structural adjustment programmes of the Bretton Woods Institutions, Africa has been able to pull through.

However, the recent global economic crisis, and now the Eurozone crisis, is affecting Africa’s economic growth – currently around 5% of gross domestic product. Africa’s economy remains relatively robust because, arguably, of the resilience of Africans. This is against the backdrop of a global economy that has effectively fallen apart: the so-called advanced economies are, for instance, projected to rebound to a mediocre 1.5% of gross domestic this year, which is probably optimistic.

The fifth and the last key issue about Africa is that, politically, Africa remains divided. The unity of Africa that Nkrumah, Nyerere, Pixley Seme, Thabo Mbeki and others have pursued remains elusive. That is why, arguably, African Renaissance has not gone far enough – the external hand of the West is ensuring that the vision of a united Africa remains a dream. The majority of Africa’s leaders are also to blame for this.

Given the realities that the continent currently faces, a practical question has to be answered, especially as we celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the African Union this year: what is to be done?

Perhaps the most fundamental issue about Africa’s political economy and her future is unity. The heterogeneity and or diversity of the continent is a potential challenge that only Africans can address, even
though the challenge is a creation of the colonialists and it continues to benefit the West as it – particularly ethnicities – lends itself to manipulation by the West for the benefit of the West. To address this challenge, we may have to go back to Afrocentric and or Pan-Africanist approaches, as articulated in the works of Archie Mafeje, Molefi Asante, Amilcar Cabral, Tiyambe Zeleza, Samir Amin, and others.

In essence, the way of life and the development project that is Afrocentric is contrary to the Eurocentric credos that Africans have been fed over centuries. The start should be to embrace the authentic African approaches to social and economic development – for instance, communalism: Africans functioning as a single entity to address pertinent challenges. Indigenous knowledge of Africans – a source of Africa’s resilience – should be the basis for the Afrocentricity and or Pan-Africanism that should be the fundamental framework shaping Africa’s affairs and Africa’s interface with the Global South in particular.

The philosophy and ideals of African Renaissance, as elaborated by Thabo Mbeki, is another potential fundamental solution to the challenges that Africa confronts, challenges that are largely the creation of the West. African Renaissance is effectively about the rebirth of Africa – Africans taking charge of their lives and the continent to determine the destiny of Africa and Africans. The late Wangari Maathai in her book – The Challenge for Africa – reminds us of Africa’s riches and disturbing poverty – the paradox that is Africa.

At a more practical level, Africa owes herself a robust developmental paradigm that should be authentically and indigenously African. In addition, given that the current economic system has failed the world and constrained Africa’s development, a peculiarly African socio-economic developmental model is needed. Africa should reject, outrightly, advice from the West and those that have been captured by the West: the West developed at the back of an interventionist economic development approach, as Ha-joon Chang recounts, but the West tells Africa to follow an economic system that is prone to further impoverishing Africa.

Given the points made above, it is clear that Africa needs a different kind of leader than we currently have or have had, in broad terms or with
some exceptions. In addition, all Africans need to go back to the drawing board. To embrace Afrocentricity and or Pan-Africanism and or Black Consciousness, the frame of reference and the point of reference for Africa and Africans should be changed, as Steven Bantu Biko appealed. In other worlds, Africa and Africans need to go back to their roots, so to speak.

The obvious starting point is *Communalism*, as indicated above – the peculiarly African deepest forms of compassion, an aspect of Ubuntu, should be embraced to precipitate the social change we desire. Communalism also suggests community governance – *community* here is defined along the lines of the perspectives advanced in Bennedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* and Robert Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*. In this context, each African has an important role to play to rid our continent of Western tendencies and other un-African tendencies. African communities are very capable of governing themselves – in fact, African communities self-governed until colonialists and imperialists forced Eurocentricity in Africa.

Just to try and elaborate the aspects of a social and economic development model for Africa – what should it practically contain? Arguably, a major component of Africa’s new socio-economic model should be social policy or robust public policies broadly.

An argument has been advanced that Africa has poor or ineffective social policies – at the extreme, I argue that there is effectively no social policy in the majority of African countries. The second major component for Africa’s socio-economic development model has to be economic policy.

Many African countries do not seem to have visions for their economies – what kind of an economy to embrace! Many African economies have not transformed – economic transformation must mean that the majority of Africans take part in an economy and that all Africans benefit from their domestic economies. At the core of the proposed model should be effective social protection systems, and mechanisms to ensure quality education and healthcare.

Overall, and importantly, the model hinted here is far from capitalism and it is not akin to what is now called state capitalism. It could further be
argued that it is different from the Chinese socialist-capitalism model. Broadly, it should draw its inspiration from the social democracies of the Scandinavian societies. For the proposed model to take place, new social pacts are a must, as Thandika Mkandawire recently argued in his public lecture at the University of Witwatersrand. The vision for the continent, and for the various African states, requires resolution of political questions or what is sometimes referred to as a national question.

As indicated above, the vision for Africa should, correctly so, be Afrocentricity and or Pan-Africanism. Again, as indicated above, leadership is paramount. Leaders, of all walks of life, have to rally societies in the adoption of the vision, and in the development of Africa’s new socio-economic model, as – more importantly – in operationalizing it.

Africa should reconsider social pacts in the context of the new (and old) challenges confronting the continent. Without a single vision shared by all of society and owned by every member of society, the model for development hinted here would remain a pipedream.

In conclusion, Africans are called upon once again to pursue a unique African development programme that is radically African. Put differently, the African agenda permeating all aspects of Africa and African life might very well require a particular kind of African cultural revolution – not anything resembling what has been termed the Arab Spring; a revolution that should culminate in a socio-economic model that is developed and owned by Africans, within the African Renaissance and or Afrocentric paradigm.

If we agree that cohesion of the African continent is critical in Africa’s pursuit of an effective development agenda, it must therefore follow that language, culture, ideology and so on are fundamental for the advancement of the African (human) condition.

Africa has to resuscitate developmental states, which were sadly interrupted by Bretton Woods System – which is effectively dead – through structural adjustment programmes, as Thandika Mkandawire has repeatedly reminded us. The measure of progress for our continent, as for the rest of the world, has to be, as Amartya Sen, John Rawls, and
more recently Joseph Stiglitz suggests, is the extent to which human development and or wellbeing is improving.

We, as the global human society, are justifiably going beyond gross domestic product in the quest to determine our progress as a species. Whatever the development agenda we pursue, going forward, has to be explicitly about advancing wellbeing and ensuring global justice.

It is in this context that we cannot, and we shouldn’t, be celebrating what is viewed as impressive economic growth in Africa – Africa remains with the majority of the Bottom Billion of the poor, globally. Given the escalating youth unemployment globally, among other challenges, we are clearly failing.

Africa cannot afford to fail any further. Africa has to rethink her political economy. The evolving world requires that the political economies of the various regions and countries adjust with the changing times.

We owe it both to ourselves as Africans and to our forefathers and foremothers to making Africa work. To make Africa work better, African cohesion is paramount.

The dream that our forefathers and foremothers had, that of unity, must be made a reality. We owe it to, among others, Nelson Mandela to make his dream of “the realization of the unity of Africa… of an Africa that is at peace with itself” a reality.

As we celebrate 10 years of the existence of the African Union, we must answer the question of how far are we in realizing the dream of African unity. Indications are that we are far.